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ABSTRACT

A common assumption among many social scientists is that identification with Mexican-American culture inhibits the development of a positive self-concept and upward mobility among members of this group. Consequently, many sectors of society have argued that complete acculturation is the most desirable goal for the Mexican-American population. The results of three studies indicate that acculturation without assimilation may be a more advantageous outcome for Mexican-Americans. In the first study, college-bound Mexican-American females identified more strongly with their traditional culture, spoke greater amounts of Spanish at home, and were more androgynous than their noncollege-bound Mexican-American counter-parts. A second study found Mexican-American high school students to be slightly more internally controlled than Anglo-American students after socioeconomic factors were controlled. First- and second-generation Mexican-American students held a more positive image of Mexican descent persons than third generation students in the third study. The combined results of the studies tend to support the paradoxical hypothesis that stronger identification with traditional Mexican-American culture promotes a greater integration into mainstream Anglo-American society. (Author)

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IDENTITY WITH TRADITIONAL MEXICAN AMERICAN CULTURE AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT[1]

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Identity with Traditional Mexican American Culture and Sociocultural Adjustment

A common assumption among many social scientists is that identification with Mexican American culture inhibits the development of a positive self-concept and upward mobility among members of this group. Consequently, many sectors of society have argued that complete acculturation is the most desirable goal for the Mexican American population. Unfortunately, the advocates of acculturation appear to be motivated primarily by ideological beliefs instead of the results of rigorous empirical studies bearing on this issue. The results of three recent studies indicate that acculturation without assimilation may be a more advantageous outcome for Mexican Americans. In the first of these studies Buriel and Saenz found that college-bound Mexican American females were more strongly identified with their traditional culture and also spoke greater amounts of Spanish at home than their noncollege-bound Mexican American counter-parts. In addition, the college-bound group was also more androgynous than the noncollege-bound group. A second study by Buriel and Rivera found Mexican American high school students to be slightly more internally controlled than Anglo American students after socioeconomic factors were controlled. Finally, Buriel and Vasquez found first- and second-generation Mexican American students to hold a more positive image of Mexican descent persons than third generation students. The combined results of these three studies support the paradoxically sounding hypothesis that identify with traditional Mexican American culture promotes greater integration with mainstream Anglo American society. Consequently, a bicultural identity which embraces both Anglo and Mexican American cultures seems desirable over total acculturation.

Identity with Traditional Mexican American Culture and Sociocultural Adjustment

Social scientists have made Mexican American culture a convenient "catch-all" for explaining the problems of this group. For example, if Mexican Americans do poorly in school, it is because their culture discourages achievement motivation (Demos, 1962); if they are unemployed or hold low paying jobs it is because their culture encourages fatalism (Kuvlesky & Patella, 1971); and, if they are involved with gangs or other forms of delinquent behavior, it is because of the anti-social and violent nature of their culture (Heller, 1966). Not surprisingly therefore, this "culture-damaging" view of Mexican American culture has prompted both social scientists and laymen to argue in favor of complete acculturation by Mexican Americans in order to successfully assimilate into American society. In other words, satisfactory adjustment to American society requires a complete disassociation from Mexican American culture.

The purpose of this paper is to challenge the prevalent social science and popular view of Mexican Americans and their culture. Specifically, this paper endeavors to yield evidence in support of the paradoxically sounding assumption that identification with traditional Mexican American culture promotes a healthier sociocultural adjustment to mainstream American society. The basis for this assumption arise from both methodological and conceptual errors in previous research with Mexican Americans. Methodological errors in previous research include failure to control socioeconomic, linguistic, and regional variables (see Padilla, 1976) which potentially explain more variance in Mexican

Americans' behavior than cultural identity. Conceptual errors include equating Mexican American ethnic status with Mexican American culture. This approach assumes that all Mexican Americans are equally identified with their ancestral culture and therefore stereotypes Mexican Americans as being "all alike". In reality though, Mexican American culture is composed of a diversity of subgroups with substantial variations in their behavior (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974) and the degree to which they hold traditional Mexican American values and beliefs.

Our own approach in this paper is to conceptualize Mexican American culture as arising from the values and life styles of Mexican immigrants to the United States. Since immigration is primarily motivated by a desire for change, upward mobility, and achievement (Gamio, 1930; Fromm & Maccoby, 1970), it is these values and beliefs which constitute the core of Mexican American culture in the United States. This core set of values and beliefs therefore represent traditional Mexican American culture. Moreover, since migration from Mexico is selective, this core set of values and beliefs should not be construed as "typical" Mexican values.

Currently, not all Mexican Americans identify with traditional Mexican American culture which therefore leads to a misrepresentation of Mexican American culture whenever ethnicity and culture are equated. As many Mexican Americans move away from the values and beliefs of their traditional culture there is not always a concomitant acculturation to Anglo American culture. Consequently, the behavior of these individuals probably comes more and more under the influence of situational variables such as poverty and urbanization. Thus, while these persons may still call themselves Mexican Americans, it is unlikely that their behavior

is reflective of traditional Mexican American culture.

With these points in mind, we would like to present the results of three recent studies by the authors which provide evidence in support of the hypothesis that identity with traditional Mexican American culture promotes healthier sociocultural adjustment to American society.

Study #1

The purpose of this study (Buriel & Saenz, 1980) was to determine if college-bound and noncollege-bound Chicanas differed along three important psychocultural dimensions including sex-role identity (masculinity and femininity), biculturalism, and socioeconomic status. It was hypothesized that college-bound Chicanas would be more androgenous and bicultural than their non-college-bound counterparts.

Subjects

The subjects were 55 Chicanas who represented the entire graduating class of a large urban high school in Southern California. School records showed that the majority of the subjects came from stable families who had lived in the same community for a number of years. There was, in addition considerable variation in subjects' gross family income, which ranged from a low of less than $4,000 per year to a high of $21,000 per year. All subjects understood and spoke English and most were bilingual.

Measures

Bem's (1974) Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was used to measure subjects' sex-role preference, and the Biculturalism Inventory for Mexican American

Students (BIMAS) (Ramirez, Castaneda & Cox 1977) to assess the subjects' degree of biculturalism. The BSRI requires subjects to rate themselves on a 7-point scale on 20 "masculine", 20 "feminine", and 20 "neutral" traits. In addition, to compensate for the possibility that the BSRI may be an "Anglocentric" measure (Senour, 1977), six additional adjectives divided equally by sex-type and reflecting desirable behaviors within the context of the Mexican-American culture were added to the scale and included in computing the subject's total masculinity and femininity scores.

The BIMAS (Ramirez, et al., 1977) measured biculturalism in five areas: (a) degree of bilingualism

(b) the frequency of intra- and interethnic friendships

(c) positive interethnic attitudes

(d) comfortable functioning in a variety of situations regardless of ethnic setting

(e) acceptance of both Chicanos and Anglos.

The BIMAS utilizes a multiple-choice format and response alternatives are given values of either 1, 3, or 5. A score of 1 on an item indicates either an exclusively Chicano or an exclusively Anglo orientation; 3 indicates either a moderately Chicano or a moderately Anglo orientation; and 5 represented an equal Chicano and Anglo orientation.

Procedure

Subjects completed the BSRI, the BIMAS and a personal information sheet. All subjects were then assigned to either a college-bound group or a non-college-bound group. The criterion for the former included an intent to attend college and previous submission of a college application, while criterion for the latter included no college plans and no previous

submission of a college application. This resulted in a sample of 25 college-bound and 30 non-college bound Chicanas.

Results

Results showed that college-bound Chicanas were more masculine, had higher parental incomes, and were significantly more bicultural than non-college-bound Chicanas. The statistical independence of these findings is confirmed by a discriminant analysis, Table 1, which showed that biculturalism was a significant discriminating variable even after controlling for the effects of subjects' masculinity scores and family income. There was no difference in the femininity scores between the two groups of subjects.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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Discussion

The sex role orientations that Chicanas hold may have important implications for college attendance since many of the traits traditionally associated with masculinity center around a cognitive and instrumental orientation. Because such an orientation would seem to be an important prerequisite for success in college, it is not surprising to find that college-bound Chicanas describe themselves as being more masculine than their non-college bound counterparts. Since the two groups did not differ in femininity, we can also say that college-bound Chicanas are more androgenous than non-college-bound Chicanas.

One dimension of biculturalism involves a Chicano outlook and set

of behaviors. Therefore, the finding that biculturalism is positively associated with college attendance challenges the assertion that identification with Chicano or Mexican American culture depresses educational aspirations and achievement motivation (Demos, 1962; Gordon, Schwartz, Wenkert & Nasater, 1968; Heller, 1966).

Finally, the greater financial resources of college-bound Chicanas' families may provide these students with more opportunities to participate more fully in both Chicano and Anglo cultures, thus accounting for their greater biculturalism.

Study #2

The second study (Buriel & Rivera, 1980) compared Anglo- and Mexican American adolescents on locus of control, familism, and socio-economic status. The study sought to evaluate the importance of socio-economic status and familism in explaining ethnic differences in fatalism. It was hypothesized that Mexican American adolescents who identified with Mexican American culture would be as internally controlled as their Anglo American peers.

Subjects

Subjects were 86 Anglo Americans (39 females, 47 males) and 80 Mexican Americans (39 females, 41 males) from two high schools in a suburban city in southern California. All subjects were drawn from mandatory English and History classes. Selection procedures yielded approximately equal numbers of lower- and upper division students in each ethnic group. There was considerable variation in subjects' family incomes which for

members of both ethnic groups ranged from a low of less than $4,000 per year to a high of over $26,000 per year. Mexican Americans were the minority at both schools.

Measures & Procedures

Subjects were administered a personal information sheet, Rotter's (1966) Internal-External locus of control scale, and a measure of familism. Familism was used as a measure of identity with the Mexican American culture because of its central importance to the value system of traditional Mexican Americans (Murillo, 1976; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974). The personal information sheet was used to gather background data including family income. Total locus of control scores were computed as well as the scores for the subcategories of luck/fate, politics, respect, leadership/success, and academics. Garza and Ames (1974) suggest that the nature of Anglo-Mexican American differences in locus of control can be more carefully examined using the subcategories of Rotter's I/E Scale.

The familism scale consisted of four items. Two of the items were selected because they had been previously used to measure familism in research involving Anglo- and Mexican Americans (Ramirez, 1967). The two remaining items were created by the present authors. The familism scale consisted of the following items:

1. Relatives are more important than friends
2. Grandparents, parents and grandchildren should all live within close visiting distance of one another
3. You should think of what is good for your family more

than you think of what is good for yourself personally

4. The word "family" includes parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts, and uncles.

Responses to the four familism items were made on a four point continuum where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 4 indicated strong agreement. Internal consistency estimates based on Cronbach's alpha were .74 for Anglo Americans and .82 for Mexican Americans.

Questionnaires were administered during regular class hours by the same Mexican American female experimenter. The experimenter read all questions aloud to control for any possible reading difficulties that might have affected subjects' responses.

Results

Data were analyzed in two steps: first to assess ethnic and sex differences in socio economic status, familism and locus of control; and second, to determine the degree to which socio economic status and familism explain ethnic and sex differences in locus of control.

Results of the first set of analyses showed Mexican Americans had lower family incomes $F(1,162) = 8.74$, $p < .01$ and higher familism scores, $F(1,162) = 6.96$, $p < .01$, than Anglo Americans. There were no ethnic differences on the full I/E scale. However, Mexican Americans scored more internally on the "respect" subscale, while Anglo Americans were more internal in the area of "politics". Overall girls were more internal than boys in the area of "academics".

A second set of analyses compared Anglo- and Mexican Americans on locus of control while controlling for the effects of socio economic status

and familism, respectively. When the effects of socioeconomic status were removed, there were no longer any ethnic differences in the area of "politics". However, the ethnic difference in the area of "respect" remained, as well as the sex difference in the area of "academics". Controlling for familism did not affect the results of the original analyses.

Discussion

Mexican American students who were identified with their native culture (as measured by familism) were as internally controlled as their Anglo American classmates. In fact, the more internal responses of Mexican Americans on the "respect" dimension of the I-E scale after controlling socio economic status indicates that they were even slightly less fatalistic than Anglo Americans. Results of the present study therefore fail to support the prevalent stereotype that Mexican Americans are fatalistic and passive. The results thus echo the recent findings of Cole, Rodriguez and Cole (1978) who also failed to find support for the stereotype of Mexican American fatalism with a sample that included high school students.

Study #3

The purpose of this study (Buriel & Vasquez, 1980) was to examine the stereotypes ascribed to persons of Mexican descent living in the United States by three generations of Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans. It was hypothesized that Anglo Americans would hold the least favorable image of Mexican descent persons and that with each successive generation,

group stereotypes of Mexican Americans would more closely resemble the less favorable image held by Anglo Americans.

Subjects

Subjects were 120 high school students drawn from 4 populations: first-, second-, and third-generation Mexican Americans, and an Anglo American group which served as a fourth and comparison group. Thirty subjects divided equally by sex were included in each of the four groups. All subjects were drawn from mandatory English classes.

Mexican American subjects born in Mexico were designated first generation. Second generation subjects were those born in the U.S. but with one or both parents born in Mexico. Third generation subjects were those born in the U.S. with both parents also born in the U.S.

Particularly for Mexican Americans, generational status can serve as a useful index of both the degree of integration within the immigrant culture and contact with Anglo American culture, which together have relevance for understanding the psychological functioning of members of this group (Dworkin, 1965; Buriel, 1975; Knight, Kagan, Nelson, & Gumbiner, 1978). To check for the validity of generational status as an index of cultural integration, a measure of Spanish language competence was obtained from Mexican American subjects. The differences among the groups were in the expected direction with the first generation having the highest Spanish language competency scores ($\bar{X}$ = 4.53) followed by second- ($\bar{X}$ = 3.96) and third generation ($\bar{X}$ = 2.46), respectively. Only the difference between first- and second generation subjects failed to reach significance.

Measures & Procedure

A check-list comprised of 10 positive and 10 negative adjectives was

used to measure subjects' stereotypes of "persons of Mexican descent living in the United States." Some of the adjectives were selected from the list used by Dworkin (1965) and others were created by the present authors on the basis of widely held stereotypes about Mexican Americans. These stereotypes are given in Table 2. Subjects indicated how appropriately each of these adjectives described "persons of Mexican descent living in the United States" using a 5-point scale ranging from "never true" to "always true". Because there is no universally accepted ethnic label to describe persons of this ethnic group, it was felt that the term "persons of Mexican descent" would most reliably elicit subjects' stereotypes about the Mexican descent population in general. This was done because within this population, ethnic labels such as Chicano, Mexican American, Latino, Hispanic, etc., usually denote specific subgroups with identifiable variations in behavior and ideology (Gutierrez & Hirsch, 1973). Such labels were thus omitted as they might have suggested to subjects that only a specific subgroup was being described. All subjects were tested in their classroom by their teachers.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Results

Data were analyzed in two ways: (1) to test the effects of Groups and Sex on positive and negative stereotypes; and (2) to test the linear trend from Anglo American to third-, second-, and first generation Mexican American adolescents on each dependent variable. Table 3 gives the means and standard deviations for positive and negative stereotypes.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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The findings revealed that with respect to positive stereotypes, first generation Mexican Americans held a more favorable image of Mexican descent persons than either third generation or Anglo American subjects, $F(3,112) = 38.39$, $p < .001$. A significant linear trend for this data $F, (1,112) = 85.83$, $p < .001$, indicated that with each successive generation, the stereotypes of Mexican Americans steadily approached the less favorable image held by Anglo Americans.

The findings for negative stereotypes showed that Anglo Americans described persons of Mexican descent more negatively, $F(3,112) = 5.38$, $p < .01$, than all three Mexican American groups who did not differ significantly from each other in their ratings. Despite the nonsignificant differences between the three Mexican American groups there was a significant linear trend $F(1,112) = 11.35$, $p < .01$ in the expected direction. Thus with each generation the negative stereotypes of Mexican descent persons steadily approached the less favorable ratings held by Anglo Americans.

Discussion

There are at least two possible explanations for the present findings. The first derives from the earlier work of Dworkin (1965) who suggested that first generation Mexican immigrants may still use Mexico as a frame of reference for social comparisons while nonimmigrant Mexican Americans use the norms of Anglo American society to evaluate themselves. The immigrant who compares himself to Mexico may recognize his relative socio economic advantages which leads to a more favorable perception of his group in the United States. On the other hand, nonimmigrant Mexican Americans who compare themselves to Anglo American norms may recognize the social,

economic and political subordination of Mexican Americans in the United States which leads to a less favorable image of their group. This interpretation however overlooks the potentially envidious effects of Anglo American prejudice as reflected in their less favorable stereotypes of Mexican Americans. Dworkin's study did not measure Anglo American's stereotypes of Mexican Americans.

Alternatively, it is conceiveable that the findings may be the result of two interrelated processes which include Anglo American prejudice and the degree to which Mexican Americans are integrated within their traditional culture. Traditional Mexican American culture, like other cultures, provides its members with a sound base of operations, complete with behavioral rules and rewarding personal experiences (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974) which probably enhance feelings of personal and group self-worth (Stoddard, 1973). However as ties with this traditional culture weaken over successive generations, Mexican Americans may become increasingly susceptible to the influence of society's negative stereotypes about members of their group. Without a firm integration in their ancestral culture to insulate them against the invidious effects of society's stereotypes, Mexican American may eventually come to accept such stereotypes as accurate descriptions of themselves and of their ethnic group and perhaps use them to guide their own behavior. In contrast, Mexican Americans who are firmly embedded in their ancestral culture are in a better position to make headway against societal prejudice. Their own culturally related experiences expose them to a favorable alternative image of their group which contradicts society's unfavorable image of Mexican Americans.

General Discussion

The combined results of these three studies are consistent with the hypothesis that identification with the Mexican American culture fosters a healthier socio cultural adjustment with mainstream Anglo American society. In the first study, Buriel & Saenz (1980) found that college-bound Chicanas were more strongly identified with their traditional ancestral culture, and were more androgenous than noncollege-bound Chicanas. In the second study Buriel & Rivera (1980), found that Mexican American high school students who were identified with their ancestral culture were slightly more internally controlled than Anglo American students after socio economic status was controlled. In the third study, Buriel & Vasquez (1980) found Mexican Americans in the earlier generations to hold more positive group stereotypes than later generation Mexican Americans. In general, then, the results of these studies indicate that Mexican Americans who identify with their traditional culture show better sociocultural adjustment inasmuch as they aspire to college, perceive control over their lives, and maintain a more positive image of themselves and their ethnic group.

Overall, the results suggest that unilateral acculturation toward Anglo American values and norms may not be a desirable goal for Mexican Americans in general. This should not be taken to mean that Mexican Americans should not integrate or assimilate themselves into the mainstream of society. Assimilation in the sense of becoming full members of society is a desirable goal. However, we argue that such an assimilation process is not even possible unless Mexican American are first allowed to retain their own cultural identity while simultaneously exploring the new and sometimes

strange cultural avenues of Anglo American society. As noted earlier in the discussion of study #3, traditional Mexican American culture provides its members with a familiar base of operations and rewarding personal experiences which increase feelings of self-worth as a Mexican American. These feelings of self-worth, in turn allow the individual to confidently explore Anglo American society without fear of losing one's sense of identity or integrity. Moreover, identity with traditional Mexican American culture acts as a buffer against the invidious effects of societal prejudice and discrimination than can weaken or destroy the individual's feeling of self worth as both a Mexican American and as a person. Strong identity with traditional Mexican American culture therefore provides individuals with a rewarding view of themselves which helps counteract the potentially damaging effects of societal prejudice and in turn facilitates integration into the mainstream of society. The outcome, therefore, is a bicultural person who is better able to meet the demands and enjoy the rewards of both the Mexican American and Anglo American cultural worlds.

Footnote 1

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Table 1

Discriminant Analysis of Psychocultural Variables

Psychocultural Variables	Univariate F	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients
Masculinity	7.43**	.50
Femininity	3.23	-.02
Biculturalism	4.77*	.17
Gross Family Income	41.24***	.57

* P < .05
** P < .01
*** P < .001

Table 2

Positive and Negative Stereotypes

	Positive	Negative
1	Hardworking	Emotional
2	Proud	Old Fashioned
3	Scientific	Authoritarian
4	Happy	Distrustful
5	Education-minded	Passive
6	Clean and neat	Hypocritical
7	Active in community affairs	Careless
8	Progressive	Snobbish
9	Friendly	Prejudiced
10	Respectful	Lazy

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Positive and Negative Stereotypes of Mexican Descent Persons living in the United States: Groups X Sex

Groups	Positive Stereotypes[a]						Negative Stereotypes[b]					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)	$\bar{X}$	(SD)
Mexican American												
First Generation (n = 30)	36.33	(3.67)	35.46	(4.77)	35.90	(4.21)	31.40	(4.10)	30.33	(4.16)	30.86	(4.09)
Second Generation (n = 30)	37.13	(4.15)	32.80	(4.12)	34.96	(4.62)	32.13	(3.85)	28.88	(4.75)	30.46	(4.57)
Third Generation (n = 30)	34.73	(5.59)	32.20	(4.12)	33.46	(5.00)	29.80	(5.10)	31.06	(3.03)	30.43	(4.17)
Anglo American (n = 30)	26.06	(2.40)	25.33	(3.19)	25.70	(2.80)	27.53	(2.03)	27.20	(2.54)	27.36	(2.26)

[a]Higher scores indicate greater agreement with Positive stereotypes.

[b]Higher scores indicate greater disagreemtn with Negative stereotypes.